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Geneva

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Proposals for further initiatives for social development

(a) Review and appraisal of progress since the World Summit for Social Development

(b) Proposals for further initiatives for the full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Johan Vande Lanotte, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Budget, Social Integration and Social Economy of Belgium.

Mr. Vande Lanotte (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General and to the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Secretariat for the preparatory work that has gone into the special session of the General Assembly. My gratitude also goes to the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee and the Working Groups, who have shown as much diplomatic ability as perseverance in the negotiations under way. I associate myself with my Portuguese colleague, Mr. Rodrigues, who spoke on behalf of the European Union.

Five years ago, in Copenhagen, as Government representatives we approved a number of international commitments in the social area. That important meeting was one element of a long series of United Nations Conferences over the course of the last 10 years which have placed the concept of sustainable human development on the international political agenda. The conviction that economic growth and development must be accompanied by an appropriate social policy and ecological concerns are the basis of this concept. None of the areas can be developed without basic concern for others and taking into account the necessity for cohesion between them. A coherent vision of sustainable development must also include a policy focused on equal opportunity.

Over the past five years, the pace of globalization has been stronger. This economic process creates progress and new challenges, unequal economic growth and well-being, the availability of new technologies and an explosion in the area of international communications. However, this globalization process also confirms that the economic, social and ecological dimensions of development are interdependent. A healthy economic base in and of itself does not guarantee that poverty and social exclusion will be eliminated. Economic progress cannot be established, nor can it be balanced without social development that enhances the active participation of individuals in the programmes that concern them.

The momentum of globalization has shown the shortcomings in the area of discipline and self-regulation in international economic events. Increased

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financial flows, which are sometimes purely speculative in nature and do not always actually follow purely economic logic, can increase the cycles of growth and stagnation. Many countries have experienced at their own expense the social repercussions of anarchy within the system. Efforts in the area of employment and access to social assistance have suffered the most.

International guidelines are devoid of meaning if they are not placed within an international legislative framework. The current evaluation process of the Copenhagen commitments shows that, in many countries, success has been achieved in the area of social policy objectives. Other initiatives are still essential. For my country, these initiatives will fit, over the next few years, within a new socio-economic strategy decided upon by the European Union at the Lisbon Council in March last year. Belgium is already drafting a national plan of action on poverty and social exclusion, which should be completed by the beginning of the fall.

Belgium supports the proposal made by the Commission at the European Council meeting on a plan for the eradication of poverty and proposes for its partners the following suggestion regarding options on standards with respect to European poverty: over the short term, a standard for the level of poverty by countries of the European Union that would correspond to half of the average income per household; over the long term, a standard established per country on the basis of a basket of consumer goods and services considered to be strictly necessary.

The common objective should be to reduce poverty in the European Union by half by 2010. For Belgium this would mean that 700,000 individuals or approximately 300,000 families are currently poor, and therefore we should reach half that figure.

The adoption at this meeting of the objective to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty by half by 2015 makes me very glad. After all, there has been no significant progress since the Copenhagen Summit. In fact, the figures indicate that the trend is getting worse. The struggle against poverty, such as the one led by the international community, the United Nations and its development funds, international financial organizations and several regional institutions, should contribute even more to the implementation of the Copenhagen conclusions. There, in the developed countries, poverty is often hidden by the problem of redistribution; the absence of economic growth often stops social development in the poor countries. It is clear to the Belgian Government that the Copenhagen objectives must be supported through dialogue and cooperation at the international level.

The Government has spoken in favour of a significant increase in the development budget over the course of the next few years following legislation, devoting, in accordance with agreed international principles, at least 20 per cent to social projects.

At the same time, the Government is considering how it can achieve the full and swift implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative for the poorest indebted countries through its national budget.

The Portuguese presidency has already stressed that development, democracy and respect for human rights are interlinked. Sustainable social development therefore requires good management that commits adequate means to social objectives such as education and health care.

Within the context of respect for social rights, the implementation of the 1998 Declaration of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the principles and fundamental rights to work are very important for the international community. Universal ratification and the implementation of the most important ILO Conventions are high priorities. They guarantee a balanced social model on the world level. Technical assistance should benefit countries that still have difficulty meeting their international obligations.

At the beginning of this month, the Belgian section of the inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), held, with the representatives of the non-governmental sector, a symposium on the possibility of a tax on international financial transactions. The Belgian Government is ready to consider the feasibility of and possible modalities for such a proposal at international forums.

A third conference on the least developed countries will be held in Brussels next May, at the initiative of the European Union and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. We hope that the European proposals submitted at that meeting will allow upgraded access to the market for the products of these countries. A wider participation

of these countries in world trade should be made easier by technical assistance, which would be very effective in this area.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that this important meeting will lead to a strengthened and more operational implementation of the Programme of Action agreed to five years ago at Copenhagen. We shall achieve this, thanks to strengthened international cooperation and in a spirit of international solidarity.

The President: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Budget, Social Integration and Social Economy of Belgium. I call on Her Excellency Ms. Zeljka Antunovic, Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia.

Ms. Antunovic (Croatia): It is my pleasure and honour to be able to address participants today on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia at the special session of the General Assembly five years after Copenhagen.

Two major world conferences marked the year 1995, at which representatives of all countries of the world reaffirmed their commitment to promote human rights in general, and particularly economic, social and cultural rights. The World Summit on Social Development brought together the largest gathering of heads of State and Government, who undertook a political commitment to fight poverty, create productive jobs and strengthen the social fabric to establish stable, safe and just societies. This reflected the wide consensus on the central role of remunerative employment in poverty reduction.

The World Summit confirmed that despite their aspirations and hopes, human rights advocates of the middle of this century, have, unlike their forebears of the eighteenth century, who gained civil rights, and those of the nineteenth century, who gained political rights, failed to fully exercise social rights. The conclusions of the World Summit clearly indicated that we are still far from attaining this goal and once again specified the actions necessary to achieve it. Moreover, the Summit recognized the inseparability of civil and political rights, on the one hand, and social rights, on the other hand. As it was pointed out in the Declaration itself, the Copenhagen Summit was one of hope, commitment and action.

An important achievement of the Summit was the marked transition away from approaches focusing on market liberalization to those directed towards social development. Focusing on three main problems — poverty, unemployment and social exclusion — the Summit identified new challenges and at the same time defined the social component as an essential element of global economic development.

It is precisely globalization, technological progress and modernization that represent the new challenges in the fulfilment of commitments made and the realization of goals set by the Summit. As the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration noted, globalization opens new opportunities for sustained economic growth and development of the world economy, particularly in developing countries. But at the same time, the rapid processes of change and adjustment have been accompanied by intensified poverty, unemployment and social disintegration. Globalization and interdependence have provided beneficial opportunities, but have also brought potential damage and costs.

Economic growth has been impressive in some countries and disappointing in others. The present socio-economic mosaic reveals a growing divide among nations, as well as dislocation among different groups within the same country. The gains from globalization have not been equally shared and its benefits are not reaching enough people. Current patterns of globalization have contributed to a sense of insecurity, as some countries, including developing countries and countries with economies in transition, have been marginalized from the global economy. It is these countries that are hindered the most in their economic development by being denied access to monetary institutions and world trade.

If well-structured and sequenced, trade liberalization can be an engine for development and poverty reduction. It may stimulate export opportunities and import competition, and the doors to liberalization, opened in domestic foreign partnerships, may create positive incentives. Without this, it is all but impossible for most countries to create a stable environment that prevents social exclusion.

In this sense, it has become essential to work towards closer integration between economic and social policies, both at the international and national levels. At the international level this implies

developing closer collaboration between international, economic and financial organizations and organizations that have a social mandate. In this way, they can jointly assist in fulfilling the goals defined at the Summit: the eradication of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. In this regard, we welcome the efforts made by the United Nations Secretary-General to strengthen ties between the United Nations and international financial institutions in an effort to strike a balance between social and economic needs for development, and also welcome General Assembly resolution 54/196, on a planned high-level international intergovernmental event on financing for development.

The Croatian Government is attempting to create an environment that enables sustainable growth by dedicating its efforts to the individual. We believe that such an environment can be achieved only through interaction between economic and social development, with the ultimate goal of pursuing the improvement of living standards for all and facilitating full and free participation in the economic, political and social arena without discrimination.

The eradication of poverty, the attainment of full employment and respect for human dignity at the highest level, as well as equal opportunity for all, are the fundamental values advocated by the Croatian Government. The policy of the Croatian Government is mainly aimed at promoting social development by creating a society that not only guarantees everyone the opportunity for self-sufficiency and active participation in the community, but also ensures that vulnerable groups have access to social services, so as to prevent social exclusion and reduce poverty. Fighting poverty and unemployment has proved doubly difficult for Croatia, as we are also experiencing the challenges of transition, which have not proved to be at all simple or short, but complex and long, with many harsh upheavals and much stress. We can only hope that the new impetus my Government has given to market and social reforms shall help to successfully expedite this transition.

Furthermore, the priority goals of the Croatian Government still include reconciliation and social reintegration in territories affected by the war, particularly in regard to enabling social and economic reintegration of returnees by encouraging economic revitalization and employment. The Croatian Government has also adopted many policy measures in the fields of employment, health, promotion of the role of women, children's rights and other measures to implement the goals set out in Copenhagen. While we are aware that more still needs to be done, we believe that we are heading in the right direction. International cooperation, including with international trade and financial institutions, can play a special role in this regard.

Croatia is also aware that the assistance and support of social partners and representatives of civil society in the formulation and implementation of planned reforms, programmes and policies is a prerequisite for success. In this respect, encouraging cooperation and dialogue between Governments and civil society plays a crucial role. Civil society actors and their development are precisely that which will guarantee that policies will always be supervised and evaluated.

At a time when global implementation of the commitments made at the Summit has barely begun, this same approach could be accepted as one way of hastening fulfilment of these commitments. It is clear that the serious impediments to social development identified at the Summit still persist, and that much more work and effort is required to fulfil the tasks set at Copenhagen.

As a final note, Croatia believes that it would be desirable to specify time limits for their achievement and to assume responsibility for national and international actions that are directed towards our common goal: the achievement of people-centred sustainable development.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Nagiyev, Minister of Labour and Social Security of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Nagiyev (Azerbaijan) (*spoke in Russian*): The report presented by the Secretary-General has demonstrated once again that the seriousness of the social-economic situation in the world compels us to seek new approaches and to undertake new measures aimed at overcoming the current lack of confidence and the tension with regard to human rights and other challenges in the social-development field. It has become increasingly evident that no country can pursue its economic and social policies in isolation from the developments in the world. This fact is reflected today in the words of concern that have been expressed about the globalization process. Our forum proves that

international cooperation and solidarity are vitally important factors for sustainable social development.

In the period since the Copenhagen Summit, economic reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan has been picking up speed and becoming irreversible. The economic crisis that swept the country in the early 1990s has been brought to an end. Considerable work has been done to foster economic recovery. It has become clear that there are no quick fixes, either on the global level or, for example, in our country. The main tasks facing us all are the basic reconstruction of our economies and ensuring sustainable growth.

At the same time, it has become understood that addressing social problems must be an integral part of the reform process. In this regard, I would like to refer to the address of former United States President Franklin Roosevelt to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference in Washington in 1941. He said that, both in international and national affairs, economic policy cannot be an end in itself; it must always be a means to achieve social goals.

At present, the fundamental government strategy for fighting poverty in the Republic of Azerbaijan involves developing reforms in the social sphere. The important components of this reform are properly targeting subsidies and pensions, creating jobs for socially vulnerable groups of the population, giving preferential treatment in education and health, and elaborating and implementing vigorous steps to integrate socially vulnerable groups of the population in the social-development process.

A great deal of work is being done on the development of institutional reforms. Since the Copenhagen Summit more than 30 pieces of legislation have been adopted. These laws are in line with international legal norms, and they regulate the social development of the country. We have worked out, for instance, a policy statement regarding reform of the pension system, and major strategic guidelines regarding poverty eradication. A policy statement on demographic development has been adopted. Migration policy has been defined, and the legislative foundation in this field has been enhanced.

One of the effective measures for providing the population social protection and for implementing our commitments over the past five years has been an active employment policy — because paid work is the best possible protection from poverty. In this regard, the Government has made sustained efforts aimed at the development of the employment system throughout the country. These efforts have included legal measures and also organizational procedures aimed at reducing poverty by stimulating productive, profitable and sustainable employment. With the goal of solving the country's employment problems and ensuring sustainable livelihoods, we are implementing policies aimed at maintaining macroeconomic stability, developing the private sector, achieving labour-market efficiency and enhancing employment of socially vulnerable groups of the population.

International organizations — including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) — are playing an increasingly active role in solving social problems in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Through the joint efforts of these and other organizations and the Republic of Azerbaijan, a number of projects on population development, employment, reproductive health, the regulation of migration and reforms in the pension system, the development of education and the social protection of children have been developed and are being implemented. This cooperation provides an active mechanism for taking successful action and for ensuring integrated approaches to the development of social policy in our country. At the same time, we believe that it is necessary to improve the quality of joint activities in order to achieve effective results and bring about the social development of our society.

In the presented report, stress is laid on the development of structures not owned by the State. This testifies to the important role played by non-governmental organizations and the private sector in the development of social welfare within society. We think that in our country the further development of joint actions between State bodies and the non-governmental sector will mobilize the necessary resources and allow for yet greater success in the reintegration of socially vulnerable groups.

Significant accomplishments have been made in the sphere of health care over the last five years. The ongoing transformation of our health-care system has

already yielded results. The scope of services has been broadened, and other relevant activities in the health sphere have been enhanced — in particular in the areas of reproductive health services and family planning. The Government is planning to further develop the principles of general access to basic medical services, especially for disabled persons, refugees and internally displaced persons — the poorest groups of our population.

Another concrete feature of our social-development activities since Copenhagen is the development of a gender policy. A State policy and measures for the enhancement of gender relations in the Republic of Azerbaijan have been defined.

National programmes relating to "the young family" have been elaborated for the period 1999-2003. We have also elaborated programmes of action for the women of Azerbaijan for the period 1999-2003 and programmes on the prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation and social protection for disabled persons for the period 1999-2002. A programme to solve the problems facing refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as other programme packages, have been elaborated, as have basic strategic directions and specific measures to integrate the above-mentioned groups of the population into the society. The implementation of these proposed programmes requires closer coordination of the relevant State bodies as well as financial support from foreign donors. Otherwise, as international experience suggests, these documents will remain only the good intentions of the Government.

Concurrently, despite the concrete measures that are being taken to implement our commitments, various factors are making this difficult. The political and economic past of Azerbaijan, the aggression and occupation by Armenia of more than 20 per cent of our territory, and the presence of a large army of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as the problems of the transition period, have led to the persistence of poverty in our country.

It is necessary to note that the ongoing Armenian aggression restricts our ability to implement the specific national commitments made at the Copenhagen Summit, including those involving the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons into the society. In this connection, Azerbaijan fully supports the paragraph 7 *bis* of the political declaration of the final document under discussion. Today when regional conflicts are threatening peace, international cooperation, with the active participation of all parties, is required as never before.

The period since the Copenhagen Summit has shown that the direction pursued by the Government of the Azerbaijan Republic in order to fulfil commitments related to the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development has been justified by concrete results. At the same time, despite the growing awareness of the contribution of human-resource development to economic and social progress, the basic social sectors — such as social protection and labour, education and health care — require a new level of appraisal and need to be enriched by new strategies and decisions. I believe that the consensus achieved at this forum on our future actions will allow us to make more tangible progress in reducing the acute problems of poverty and in bringing about social progress for all.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdurahman Mohamed Shalghem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Shalghem (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, and the other members of the Bureau on the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of this special session of the General Assembly. I would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to the Preparatory Committee. They have done outstanding work in preparing for this session. I would like to congratulate them on the high quality of the documents that we have before us. I am sure they will contribute to the success of our work and will allow us to achieve tangible and positive results.

Five years have passed since the Programme of Action and the Declaration were adopted in Copenhagen. Of course in these years there have been a great many positive developments as a result of those instruments. We can certainly say today that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action have made a tangible contribution to enhancing awareness within the international community as to the importance of social development. We have also managed to stress the idea of people-centred development, of the individual human being at the very heart of the development process.

The international community is now aware of its obligation to bring about social development in order to improve the quality of life for human beings throughout the world. This clearly involves eradicating poverty, generating opportunities for productive employment, bringing about social reintegration and integration, and allowing everyone within society to participate in the development and decision-making processes within their own society.

All of this, then, is very positive, as we review what has been achieved over the past five years as a result of the Copenhagen Summit. It is also clear that the international community wants to move forward. But alongside this, we must admit that what has actually been achieved is rather modest. The rich are still becoming richer and the poor are still becoming poorer. More than 1 billion people live in abject poverty today. More and more people throughout the world are unemployed. Social inequalities are increasing, and the gap between rich and poor is becoming wider in many countries. All of this is leading to problems of many types and indeed is threatening peace and stability in many countries.

The Copenhagen Declaration talks about creating an enabling environment in social, economic and political terms in order to allow people to enjoy the fruits of social development. This clearly means that we have to strengthen and improve international, regional and subregional cooperation if we are to foster social development in a spirit of partnership.

Many developing countries today have indeed done their duty. They have done what they can do at the national level to bring about social development. Nonetheless, we have to admit that we do not yet have the whole enabling environment that is required if these countries are truly to attain the objectives set out in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

Official development assistance remains very modest. And when one looks at the level of official development assistance and at the level of debts and debt-servicing charges that have to be paid by developing countries, one sees that there is an obstacle to social and economic development. This in fact means that it is not possible for the domestic products of many developing countries to make it to the international market at all. And it is far less possible for these products to be marketed internationally at reasonable prices.

Of course it was recognized that eradicating poverty and the realization of the other components of the Declaration have to be a national responsibility, but it was also recognized that it is possible to eradicate poverty only if there is a general commitment to that effect within the international community. This being the case, we are here to reiterate our commitments and our willingness to fight poverty, because it does in fact threaten world peace and security.

We must be ready and willing to bring to an end the terrible problems we face in the world today. Terrorism, including State terrorism, hunger, malnutrition, foreign occupation, drug addiction and similar problems all arise from the basic problem of poverty. Of course there is also the problem of disease, of combating malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS, to name but a few.

So what are we going to do in practical terms? We have to take some pragmatic and valuable steps that will allow us to get down to the work of reforming international financial institutions and to render decision-making processes at the international level more democratic and transparent, so that everyone can participate in them properly. Such actions would allow us to combat the negative effects of globalization, particularly the marginalization of developing countries within the global economic system.

The social and economic situation in Africa remains critical. Despite all efforts exerted by African countries themselves, trying to meet their commitments, poverty remains an integral part of life in most African countries today. In addition, there are the other scourges that these countries face, such as AIDS, malaria and so on.

The situation in Africa today is tragic, and it demands a serious response from the international community. We need to help the continent of Africa to overcome the problems and conflicts it faces. We need to enhance regional mechanisms that will allow peace and stability to return to Africa, so that the dark continent can finally play its rightful role in the family of nations.

Of course the very difficult conditions imposed by international financial institutions make life almost impossible for African countries. Clearly, if we are to

tackle this problem, we need to adopt a convention that at the very least would guarantee fair and reasonable prices for the products of African countries in global markets. We must also lift the barriers that prevent the products of these countries from reaching international markets. Measures must be taken if we are to find a solution to the external-debt problem, which many of these countries also face.

It is not enough just to cancel the debt of a few least-developed countries. This in itself is not sufficient. What we need is to cancel the debts of all African countries. After all, this is the least that the countries that have pillaged the continent of Africa for many centuries can do.

In my country, of course, we do our utmost to seek to put an end to these types of problems, and surely our brother and President Al-Qadhafi spares no effort in seeking to end conflicts raging in Africa today. What he has done so far has indeed been successful, and the Sirte agreement attests to that. That agreement put an end to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya certainly made a significant contribution to achieving those positive conclusions. We are also doing our utmost to ensure that refugees and displaced persons throughout Africa can enjoy medical and nutritional services.

Nonetheless, certain economic restrictions have been imposed on our country by the United States of America. This has led to a situation of virtual embargo. Yet, despite all that, we have gone on and have sought to develop education and the health sector in our country. I repeat, despite all that, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has undertaken a number of measures to make the best possible use of its material resources. We have adopted various pieces of legislation intended to improve employment policies throughout the country, improve health care and ensure that education and good housing are available to everyone. We are trying to break the vicious circle of poverty in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and allow our people to live in peace and social well-being.

We have adopted a special system of economic partnership that allows everyone in our society to participate. We have various plans that, for instance, give each citizen of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya the right to housing and comprehensive health care. That cannot be said even of some highly developed countries.

It should also be noted that the illiteracy rate has dropped. It was 22 per cent five years ago and is now only 18 per cent. So, again, we are winning the fight.

All this is based on a clear strategy, a strategy of economic partnership activities in which everyone participates. We do not have a system whereby salary is paid in an old-fashioned way; we have a system whereby everyone is allowed to participate in the cooperative in which they work, and this allows everyone to play a role in the country's economic life on a fair and equal footing.

In 1999, more than 3,000 cooperatives were set up in our production and services sector. We are trying to ensure that everyone enjoys equal opportunity to participate in the country's economic life, so that people do not have to live artificially, as they did in the past. This has been successful. We have been able to increase our productivity. We have also been able to increase output in the agricultural sector of the country. This has enhanced our food security.

In conclusion, I assure the Assembly that we look to this special session with great interest. We hope that we will finally be able to implement the decisions we took five years ago at Copenhagen. We hope that no international effort will be spared in seeking to attain the goals of Copenhagen. It goes without saying that holding this special session in Switzerland is very significant. After all, Switzerland is a very rich country. It has enormous resources, and the fact that everyone has come here means that we all have a real chance and real encouragement to reaffirm our commitment to the Copenhagen goals.

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Aurelio Varela, Minister of the Secretariat for Social Policy of Paraguay.

Mr. Varela (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Paraguay, which I am honoured to lead, is participating in this twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly to assess the progress and shortcomings in the implementation of the commitments and the Programme of Action adopted in 1995 at Copenhagen. Five years after that event, we are participating with great interest and expectations, since social development in Paraguay is a priority, and our

efforts are devoted to seeking permanent solutions to the problems of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

At the end of the Copenhagen Summit, we had great hopes that the commitments undertaken by the developed countries and by those countries undergoing development and hoping for greater development could bring immediate benefits and that the globalization process on which we are embarked would bring solutions and would not exacerbate existing problems. We believe that developed and developing countries must work together harmoniously, creating greater opportunities for growth for the less developed countries, since economy is the basic foundation for generating, maintaining and consolidating broad social development that will benefit equitably the neediest.

However, despite the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations among countries and the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), we continue to see the same problems of access to markets to sell agricultural products. We also note that this production is not competitive with, nor does it have the same selling opportunities as, the production of developed countries, since the latter have excessive subsidies that distort the concept of agricultural production with strange ideas, such as multifunctionality of agriculture, or because concepts that are alien to international trade are introduced, such as labour conditions or environmental matters.

Paraguay is a founding member State of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), together with Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay; Chile and Bolivia are associated countries. Paraguay is one of the relatively least developed countries and is landlocked, which places us at a disadvantage in terms of international trade. Therefore, we require broad understanding and international solidarity from transit countries and those that have a coastline, in order to be able to generate appropriate conditions for trade so that we can compete on an equal footing with the countries that have a coastline.

In 1989, at the end of a period of authoritarian Government, a process of democratizing institutions and building a legal framework was begun in my country, which initiated a new phase in national life. Until now, the main goal of successive transitional Governments has been the consolidation of democracy and ensuring representative and participative democracy in full freedom and with full respect for human rights.

The current Government of Mr. Luis Angel González Macchi has envisaged consultation with and the wide participation of all political parties in order to form a Government of national unity to generate conditions of governability, democratic consolidation, security and internal stability so that we can face the task of economic development and focus successfully on a sustainable process of social development.

Since Copenhagen, five years ago, Paraguay has experienced unfavourable times in the political and economic spheres, which has had repercussions on social development. However, at the end of 1995 there was significant progress, and as an immediate result of the Summit, with the creation of the Secretariat for Social Policy of the Presidency of the Republic, with two strategic axes of management aimed at formulating social policies and at financing projects to fight poverty and to care for vulnerable groups through social investment funds.

In 1996, with United Nations support, the Secretariat for Social Policy formulated a strategic 20-year plan for social development, which identified 3 substantive challenges to progress in the area of social development. The first challenge is to achieve a sustained pace of economic growth that provides the necessary framework to generate productive opportunities and the resources necessary to finance social development. The second challenge is to reach an integrated and structural solution to the problem of rural poverty. The third challenge is to build the base of a modern social policy focused on increasing the productive capacities of people and on satisfying their basic needs, thus achieving social integration.

Along these lines, the current Government has created the Advisory Council for social policies and combating poverty, which brings together social institutions of the State, civil society organizations, the Catholic Church, farmers' organizations and labour unions. The idea is to establish a powerful alliance for policies and programmes, in the understanding that social development is a concern not only for the governmental bodies but for all those who play a role in Paraguayan society.

Similarly, the methodology of the programmes to combat poverty in emergencies and other urgent situations is based on coordination, participation,

targeting and decentralization. This approach involves transferring State resources and services to the poor rural and urban populations in order to generate synergies between the community and the intermediary organizations, so as to stimulate programmes for advancement and development.

At present 32 per cent of the population is affected by poverty, and the rate of unemployment is 19 per cent. Nonetheless, and in spite of economic limitations, we have made significant progress in the area of social spending, which went from 3 per cent of gross domestic product in 1990 to 8.2 per cent in 1998. The Government's programme has strengthened the process of educational reform, and we have improved the quality of teaching and increased the educational system's coverage, so that now more than 90 per cent of boys and girls are provided basic schooling. Average life expectancy has now reached 69 years, and infant mortality has been reduced to 20 per 1,000 live births, although we recognize that there is a good deal of under-reporting here.

In order to achieve the objectives of accelerated social development, the Government is currently undertaking a State reform so as to increase the efficiency and results of current expenditures. Another objective is to further our policy of economic and commercial openness, allowing for the free play of market forces, while at the same time taking care that changes do not take place in an uncontrolled manner or result in those with the least resources being unfairly burdened. We are seeking to institutionalize the bodies charged with managing the economy and social policies, and, while providing the best guarantees, we are also seeking to privatize Government entities that are experiencing deficits.

As regards fulfilling the commitments and national goals of the World Summit, in sum, the Government strategy is based on the following components. One is the consolidation of a favourable legal and economic environment for social development, with the consensus support of the Government and civil society. Another is a vigorous policy for the control and eradication of extreme poverty and for lowering, in the medium-term, rural poverty and urban marginalization. A third component is the creation of jobs as a firm and real basis for increasing the well-being of the population. A fourth is seeking the basis of an appropriate social-integration policy, in view of the fact that we have a homogeneous population made up of people earning disparate levels of income and that we need to narrow the current income gaps. A fifth component is to increase formal education at the various educational levels — primary, secondary, tertiary and post-graduate — and to institute a training policy to increase production and productivity. A sixth component involves the incorporation of appropriate technologies, especially in rural production, to increase profits in the agricultural sector. A seventh component involves seeking new investments, for which we are counting on international cooperation and the more developed countries.

It is clear that national efforts are not sufficient if we do not have international cooperation that transfers knowledge and technologies and facilitates financing. Above all, the developed countries must accept equitable standards for international trade, opening markets and eliminating subsidies. Any national effort must be accompanied by international solidarity.

We Paraguayans are ready to take immediate and effective action to seek solutions to social problems, because if we do not, we may find ourselves in a vicious circle in which unsatisfied demands create political instability, and this instability in turn leads to a deterioration of the necessary conditions for economic and social development. Therefore, we are facing a great challenge, and we in Paraguay believe that we have to fight to eliminate the obstacles to creating a civil society with social justice, equity and greater well-being for the population.

Finally, as a Member State of the United Nations we look forward to the political, technical, economic and financial outcomes of this special session being reflected in the near future in a greater sense of brotherhood among countries, in a united and joint effort to find ways and resources to create sustainable economic growth and to allow human beings to flourish in an environment of peace, justice and well-being.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, Minister-delegate responsible for the Advancement of Women, Family Welfare and Social Affairs of the Office of the Prime Minister of Djibouti.

Mrs. Youssouf (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by warmly thanking the Swiss Government for the cordial welcome. I would also like

to thank the Secretariat for the quality of the organization of this international meeting to follow up on the Copenhagen Summit.

A little more than five years have elapsed since the World Summit for Social Development was held in Copenhagen. Here we are meeting together once again to look at what progress has been made in implementing the commitments we shouldered then. The fact that we are here shows that we want to combat poverty in all its diverse forms and to fight for truly sustainable development.

Undoubtedly, it must be admitted, that the time elapsed has been rather short for implementing the reforms and measures recommended. Nonetheless, I am pleased to note the progress that has been made, even if it is only in increasing awareness of the magnitude of the challenge we face.

We all know that poverty is not inevitable; it is a result of many factors — socio-political, economic and environmental. There is no panacea. But I believe that we must henceforth accord top priority to enhancing our human capital.

Turning now to the situation in my country, the most recent studies conducted there reveal a very worrisome situation. More than 50 per cent of households do not have access to the minimum necessary for subsistence. Furthermore, there are striking contrasts. Relative progress has been made in some fields — basic education, access to drinking water and the advancement of women, for instance — but this is offset by a lack of job openings. Unemployment is about 60 per cent, and the situation is even more serious for young people and, above all, for women.

Unemployment and income insecurity have been shown to be by far the main factors in creating poverty. Nonetheless, obstacles to individual, family and collective well-being are not restricted to employment problems. The need for basic social services is just as acute. The most vulnerable groups have to live with a whole host of handicaps that compromise their very existence.

I believe that this very brief analysis gives the Assembly some idea of the magnitude of our problems. Despite the disappointing results to date, and although it is a little early to measure effectively what has been accomplished since 1995, we remain confident in our chosen path.

Economic growth, no matter how great, cannot in itself reduce poverty unless it increases the sources of income and employment for poor people and broadens access to basic social services. On the basis of this analysis of the sustainable development challenge, Djibouti decided to undertake an in-depth reform in order to address jointly our pressing needs for economic efficiency and to combat poverty.

Since 1996, with the support of development partners, the Government of Djibouti has been carrying out a structural adjustment programme, which includes a significant social component. Thus, despite restrictions on public expenditures, social budgets have been maintained, and, above all, we have been able to avoid massive lay-offs by calling upon worker solidarity.

These measures do not stand in isolation. They are accompanied by major projects entirely devoted to the fight against poverty, such as our Social Fund for Development and ADETIP.

Furthermore, concern for good governance remains a key element in our new policy. Strengthening our analytical capabilities is a major objective, because we know how crucial information and its use are in monitoring the evolution of household living conditions. Thus, a statistical survey was conducted in 1996 and another has been scheduled for the end of this year. This will allow us to better evaluate the evolution of the overall situation of the living standards of the population.

I would like also to mention a few of the legal measures that have been taken. A new family code will soon be adopted, and we have adopted a new penal code and have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In institutional terms, the new President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, upon taking office, established three new social ministries: the Ministry for Employment and National Solidarity, the Ministry of State for the Advancement of Women, Family Well-being and Social Affairs, which is engaged in formulating a strategy to integrate women in the development process; and the Ministry of State for Decentralization and Local Communities.

This demonstrates the political will of the President of the Republic in this connection.

Local situations vary, but it is clear that our efforts will continue to be in vain without democracy and so long as political instability and fratricidal wars continue all over Africa. In the light of those scourges – which in recent times have been particularly severe in the Horn of Africa and whose consequences, including massive refugee flows, have often affected my country and continue to do so – the President of the Republic is sparing no effort to bring about peace between the countries in conflict in that region and to restore civil harmony to other countries that are experiencing internal problems.

Most important and courageous among his initiatives has been the peace plan for Somalia, which he has been pursuing since coming to office. For more than a month, the Republic of Djibouti has been hosting the Conference on reconciliation among the Somali people to help that people overcome the unacceptable situation they have faced for a decade and recover their dignity and their rightful place in the comity of nations. We are seeking to reflect in that contribution our deep conviction that together, in peace and in the richness of our diversity, we can win the fight against poverty.

In the face of the increasing globalization of the economy, which threatens to weaken our countries even further, we must properly assess what is at stake and act accordingly. My country reaffirms its commitment to do all it can to attain the objectives of fighting poverty and achieving lasting human development, which are prerequisites for the achievement of just, prosperous societies.

But all of this requires a greater contribution from the international community through the cancellation of the debt of poor countries and the provision of financing adapted to the needs and individual characteristics of each country.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Magvaši, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of Slovakia.

Mr. Magvaši (Slovakia) (*spoke in Russian*): The international campaign for social progress that was launched at the World Summit for Social Development held at Copenhagen in March 1995 has provided great impetus for progress in the Slovak Republic. Commitments resulting from the Copenhagen Declaration have been incorporated in the policy for transforming the social sphere in the Slovak Republic adopted in late 1995 by the Government and the parliament of the Slovak Republic. In transforming the social sphere, we are aiming to create an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will enable the citizens of the Slovak Republic to achieve social development.

Our principal aim is to create a socially just system of social security based on the personal participation of citizens, social solidarity and State guarantees. Social benefits are provided under the same conditions across the entire territory of the Slovak Republic; no group is excluded. The principle of guaranteeing basic living conditions is applied also to foreigners, stateless persons, refugees, temporarily displaced persons and family members in material need. Besides those social assistance benefits, the following elements are part of our system: social prevention, social counselling, social and legal protections, social services and financial compensation allowances for severe physical or mental disability.

Social prevention plays an important role here. It is not only an integral part of all the forms of social assistance provided by State and non-State entities and by municipalities; through its institutions and activities it is an important component of the system for the prevention of socio-pathological factors throughout society. To make these preventive activities as effective as possible, we emphasize the link between preventive measures involving criminal law and other kinds of preventive measures. National and regional preventive programmes are regularly evaluated and updated.

The Government of the Slovak Republic has committed itself to developing policies and programmes that will secure and extend the participation of women as equal partners in all areas of political, economic, social and cultural life. The key policy document of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the area of women's issues is our 10-year National Action Plan for Women, formulated in 1997.

Since its new Government came to office in 1998, the Slovak Republic has intensified its involvement in the activities of world organizations. Here I should mention our cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), where we have become a titular member of the Governing Body of the International

Labour Office and chaired the government group during the 87th session of the International Labour Conference, held last year. We devote particular attention to ILO conventions and standards and we support ILO declarations that promote the creation of jobs through a variety of activities, and whose implementation promotes full, productive and freely chosen employment. In 1999, my Government adopted its document on employment policy through 2002 with the aim of achieving one of the priorities of our economic and social policy: full employment.

Let me also mention International Labour Organization Convention no. 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, which in 1999 the Slovak Republic was one of the first countries to ratify. I attach great importance to the fact that the Slovak Republic has ratified all eight core conventions of the ILO. I see this as an undoubted contribution to social cohesion.

The key factors and basic prerequisites for building a cohesive society are trust and participation. Thus, when building a cohesive society we have to focus on formulating strategies and principles that will strengthen trust among citizens and trust in State administration. It is obvious that key conditions for promoting trust are the elimination of economic disparities and the development of respect for cultural differences.

Allow me to conclude by expressing the support of the Slovak Republic to the United Nations. In particular, we support United Nations activities aimed at achieving stability and sustainable growth throughout the world. The Slovak Republic will do its best to implement the conclusions of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Matar Humaid Al-Tayer, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Tayer (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I bring greetings to you, Mr. President, from His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates. I would also like to convey to you the greetings of his brother, His Highness Sheikh Maktoum Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates.

Let me also congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of this special session and express the wish that this conference will be most successful. We are very pleased to be participating, along with this elite group of heads of State and heads of Government, in these efforts to achieve the edification of a new world of social development that will ensure prosperity and progress for all peoples of the world.

Let me also thank the Secretary-General and his colleagues for the excellent preparatory work they did for this conference.

This session is being held at the dawn of a new millennium, five years after the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and the commitments undertaken in the area of development. We are endeavouring, along with all States of the world, to achieve a common goal, which is to ensure development for all. Many people have untiringly been carrying out these recommendations at various levels, in spite of the obstacles posed by wars, difficult economic conditions and poverty, which block the road to development and hinder the achievement of the aspirations of peoples. We believe that these are very serious matters on which we must focus our attention if we wish to achieve development and prosperity for all.

Our policies are human-centred, because the human being is at the centre of all development and resources. That is why we have a stable policy. Our country has achieved record progress at all local and regional levels, in particular in the area of regional and international cooperation. We have also been able to strike a balance between economic and social development. In addition, we have been exerting every effort to implement fully the recommendations emanating from, and the commitments undertaken at, Copenhagen in 1995.

We would like to comment briefly on our country's achievements in the field of development. Generally speaking, our economic, social and cultural development over the past few years and the progress achieved have extremely significant. Moreover, our country's economy has grown substantially. For instance, the gross national product reached 181 billion dirhams in 2000, from 170 billion in 1998. This has made increased resources and higher-quality services available for all citizens of the country.

New resources and means have made it necessary for us to take a different, scientific approach. We have had to set up education and training systems that take into account these new developments. In fact, we were one of the first countries to come forward with a document on education strategies that represents our country's vision of the requirements of teaching as we move towards the year 2020. Thus both teaching and training have been very important in ensuring literacy.

One of the priorities of my Government is to increase the matriculation rate in primary schools, which is 96 per cent for boys and 92.5 per cent for girls. Attendance at the secondary-school level has increased to 76 per cent for boys and 84 per cent for girls. Many girls go on to attend universities.

In the area of health services, we have developed an integrated system that makes health care available to all. We have done our utmost to implement World Health Organization directives in order to achieve the objective of health for all. There are 169 hospitals and clinics, with 7,000 hospital beds and one doctor available for each 600 patients, and one nurse for each 300. Life expectancy has reached 76.5 years for women and 73.9 for men. We are among the most advanced countries in the area of life expectancy.

A number of strategies are in place to combat childhood and chronic diseases and safeguard maternal health. The infant mortality rate has dropped to 9.44 deaths per 1,000 live births, and we have also noted a significant drop in mortality at birth.

A great deal has been done in the area of social services. A number of laws have been passed to ensure the social welfare of people, one of which covers more than 30,000 families in the areas most in need. Also, a 1999 law deals with pensions and special grants for all categories of people. Other pieces of legislation deal with special categories: the elderly, the young and the disabled, for instance.

We have put a lot of effort into the area of youth and culture, and accordingly we have established a number of cultural centres for youth. Our country is also concerned about providing marriage grants and financial assistance to young people. Twenty-one thousand young couples have benefited from this assistance, which so far has totalled 1.336 billion dirhams.

We also support sports federations, which have increased in number from three to 27. The number of sporting clubs for young women and girls has increased from eight to 34.

In the area of employment, we have tried to raise national competence levels. We have set up a special body to train managers, and we also host a number of foreigners from many different countries. I can safely say that the labour market is a very good model and example of regional and international cooperation. Foreigners have full protection under Law No. 8 of 1980 and under the various conventions that we have signed.

In our country women enjoy full rights as members of society. They are equal to men in all areas. They have access to higher education, including university education. The number of female students is greater than the number of male students at all educational levels. Women participate in social work. Their rate of participation in the labour market has increased. About 20 per cent of posts in the federation of ministries are held by women; 14.7 per cent of teaching positions are held by women; and 56.1 per cent of posts in the medical, pharmaceutical and teaching sectors are held by women.

Women have employment benefits. They receive the same level of salary as men. They are also promoted to high-ranking positions. Many social activities are also available to women, and 17,000 women and children benefit from them. There are women's associations, for example, in the fields of scouting and counselling, making services available to women.

While we are aware of the importance of achieving sustainable development, and of our duty to guarantee economic and social rights for all citizens of our country, we are also aware that a number of developing countries are experiencing a lack of resources. In that respect, we have assumed our international responsibility and have participated in the economic and social development of those countries, thanks to material and in-kind assistance which we are providing through national and regional institutions or, in some cases, directly. This assistance is given on the basis of favourable concessionary conditions, and we have cancelled the debt and interest on debt of certain developing countries that are overburdened by debt.

We are trying to make as much progress as possible in order to optimally implement the 1995 Copenhagen recommendations. Despite our effort to assess everything that has been done over the last five years, we feel we must continue to move towards the priority objective, which is the achievement of social development for everyone within the context of globalization. It is therefore very important to stress the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action, while at the same time doing our utmost to assist United Nations institutions. We wish all participants the greatest success.

The President: I call on Her Excellency Ms. Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State for Children and Youth of Canada.

Ms. Blondin-Andrew (Canada): Five years ago I had the privilege of attending the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, where our nations pledged to work together to improve the social well-being of the world's citizens. We committed ourselves to an ambitious programme of action to eradicate poverty, increase productive employment and ensure greater social integration and inclusion.

Today, I again feel privileged to attend this special session to assess together how we have measured up against the commitments and challenges of Copenhagen and what more we can do to realize our common objective: social development for all in a globalizing world.

I would like to reflect on what has happened in those five years — both nationally and internationally — as we come to understand better the challenges and opportunities of globalization.

The context for social development has changed since 1995. There have been unprecedented advances in technologies, information and communications. The roles of the public and private sectors have evolved in managing national economies. The public sector has been shrinking, its resources diminished. World trade has dramatically increased as trade borders and barriers have disappeared through regional trade agreements and electronic commerce. Civil society is playing a more active role in shaping Government responses and policies.

But increased economic growth has not automatically translated into equitable distribution of benefits, within countries and between countries. In some cases globalization has exacerbated the marginalization of disadvantaged groups. And there is a growing sense of insecurity, as the already disadvantaged see uncertainty in their future potential to take full, productive part in the new economy and to profit from its advantages.

No country is spared the discipline, and none is denied the benefits. In Canada, in the past decade, we have had to make difficult adjustments. We are a trading nation. But our commodity-based economy no longer generates the wealth we need to provide the high standard of social well-being that Canadians expect their Governments to foster. Canada has had to free resources to invest in the new knowledge and information economy and introduce strict fiscal measures during the transition in order to restore the economy to good health. We have had to retool government involvement in social development, adjusting its role as direct provider of services. We also had to provide for those whose lifetime employment in traditional jobs had suddenly disappeared.

How did we respond? First of all, we carefully analysed the issues: the investment needed to adjust our economy to globalization; the dangers of polarization between communities and groups; the risks of further marginalization of vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society; environmental protection; and social fragmentation and exclusion.

Next, we looked at our strengths. Canadians have a profound attachment to the social values that unite and define our nation. We share a common vision of a society in which every citizen, regardless of race, gender, age, ability or wealth, enjoys the opportunity to fully participate in the economic, social and civic life of the nation. Our quest is for a society in which prosperity is not limited to a few, but is shared by — and is the responsibility of — many, a society where citizens can enjoy the highest quality of life.

In the words of Canada's Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien:

> "The success we have achieved as a nation has come not only from strong growth, but from an abiding commitment to strong values — caring, compassion, an insistence that there be an equitable sharing of benefits of economic growth."

We recognized the unprecedented opportunities before us, the potential of new technologies, enhanced trade and investments, new partnerships and the global flow of information and knowledge that enable countries to meet the new challenges.

We worked together. With our provincial and territorial partners we defined a new approach to social policy based on shared values and objectives and the active participation of other actors. We renewed our active commitment to engage civil society in the development and delivery of programmes and services. We benefited by recognizing the contribution the private sector can play in the efficient delivery of some services.

We are proud of our achievements. Our economy has strengthened. Our unemployment rate has significantly decreased. In the last few years, Canada has ranked first on the United Nations Development Programme development index for measuring the quality of life. Our national experience has set the stage for continued sustainable economic growth that encompasses Canadian ideals of social justice, good governance, equity, the protection of vulnerable groups and the protection of the environment. The approach is based on the following principles: commitment to peace, order and good government, with respect for human rights for all citizens; a multicultural nation State; investment in children and youth, our leaders for the twenty-first century; stronger basic social services, in particular health care; skills and knowledge, and lifelong learning, as keys to economic security in a global economy; environmental protection; stronger communities through partnerships with all members of civil society; and special measures to strengthen the inclusion of aboriginal peoples, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, women, youth and the elderly.

Canada is part of the international community, and that community is now struggling with similar issues, as together at this special session we define the way forward to achieve social development for all in a globalizing world.

We know the issues: rapid technological change and increased world trade that create opportunities, but also pose risks such as increasing disparities and marginalization between rich and poorer countries; environmental pressures; growing unemployment and new health challenges. Here I would mention in particular the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which has wiped out the gains of two decades of development in a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa.

We know the questions — and I believe we also know some of the answers. First, we need a common framework for international action based on shared goals and values, including equity, respect for basic rights, inclusion, protection of vulnerable groups and environmental sustainability. The programme of action that we will adopt at this special session provides us with this framework.

Next, we need to adapt our international institutions and systems to implement this programme of action. Our experience in the past five years has shown that we will achieve neither sustainable economic development nor sustainable social development without integrating the two. A multilateral system in which economic, social and financial institutions work independently is no longer viable. We need to develop a culture of partnership among the United Nations, the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Without this the agencies will fail to realize their own mandates, and the multilateral system will fail its member States.

It is fitting that this special session take place in Geneva, home to the agencies of technical expertise and practical action in social and economic development — employment and respect for workers' rights at the International Labour Organization (ILO), health at the World Health Organization (WHO), communications technologies at the International Telecommunication Union and trade at the WTO. We salute in particular the vision and commitment to coherence and partnership that is so prominent in the leadership of the new Directors-General at the ILO and WHO. This is the way forward for the specific institutions and for the international system as a whole.

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jayanana (Thailand), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The truth is spreading that we must all work together. History and necessity have opened Canada to the world. Recognizing that no nation can prosper and advance in disregard of others, we are committed to multilateralism. We believe in the power of partnerships and in our collective capacity to shape the future. We will sustain our active participation in international, regional and cultural forums to promote Canadian values of social justice and inclusion.

I close with a pledge that we Canadians will sustain our commitment to multilateral action in order to respect our human dignity and give concrete expression to the value we place in social justice and action, so as to bring closer the day when we achieve social development for all in a globalizing world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Nany, Minister for Economic Affairs and Development of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Nany (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by congratulating the President on his election to chair this twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

This special session, as we know, is devoted to assessing the results achieved since the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. At that Summit, world leaders adopted 10 commitments of great significance to all mankind. The leaders committed themselves to preparing an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that would favour social development. They also committed themselves to developing effective programmes for fighting poverty and for guaranteeing employment and social integration. They committed themselves to finding appropriate long-term solutions to the debt problem, especially the debt burden borne by African countries.

Five years have passed since the Copenhagen meeting. We are here now to look at what has been achieved and at the prospects for the future. We are also here to work together for sustainable comprehensive global social development, in line with the aspirations of people throughout the world.

My country has been able to make great progress towards democracy by committing itself to the rule of law and by guaranteeing individual and collective freedoms, particularly in the health and education sectors and the labour market. Despite the enormous challenges faced by Mauritania today — and, indeed, similar challenges are being faced by other developing countries whose resources are limited — we have over the past five years made considerable efforts to bring about social development. Thirty-seven per cent of our public expenditure has been devoted to social issues. This is, in fact, twice the level that was recommended at the Copenhagen Summit.

This level of investment has allowed us to increase the number of children in school. Five years ago only 76 per cent of school-age children in Mauritania were in school, and now 90 per cent of them are. We have also been able to reduce inequalities between boys and girls. Today, 83 per cent of girls in Mauritania attend school. As for the fight against illiteracy, we have been able to provide adult literacy classes, and we have also been able to reduce the number of illiterate people in Mauritania by one third.

Turning to the health sector, we have pursued the policy that we defined in 1992. We have stressed prevention and access to health-care services and also the need to make medicines available at affordable prices that correspond to the citizens' buying power. In 1994, 63 per cent of the population enjoyed medical coverage. We were able to increase that figure to 75 per cent in 1998. We have also managed to increase the percentage of people who have access to clean drinking water. Here again a great deal has been done.

As for the on gender issue, we have been able to improve the participation of women in our country's economy. Here of course we are looking towards general development of the family as well as the need to protect women. Women are now allowed to participate in all aspects of economic, political and social life in the country.

Efforts to eradicate poverty remain a priority for my Government. We have achieved significant results thanks to various programmes. We have a programme, for instance, intended to improve social services. This covers the health and education sectors. We have also tried to improve income-generating activities and to ensure that we appropriately tackle labour-intensive activities. It is our hope that by the year 2015 we will have reduced the number of citizens living below the poverty line, achieving a figure of only 12 per cent by 2015. We hope to do this by improving the competitiveness of our national economy, by improving social services, by fostering balanced economic growth and by ensuring that we are able to reclaim a large amount of land within our country.

We hope that the approach we have taken, the strategy we have outlined, will enable us to achieve the results I have just sketched out. We believe, therefore, that we should rebalance the country's economy, effect a drop in inflation and achieve real economic growth in Mauritania. We very much hope that our country will

be one of the first to benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, from which we are expecting a great deal.

The world today is facing enormous challenges. There is the problem of the technological gap, the divide between rich and poor countries and the fact that least developed countries are increasingly marginalized. A lack of foreign investment and financial flows to developing countries means that those countries are not able to gain access to developed countries' markets. The developing countries also face problems of trade imbalances and trade deficits. All of these problems constitute a whole series of obstacles relating to the participation of developing countries in global markets.

Globalization of course offers enormous opportunities. We can make it a driving force for growth, for the integration of developing countries into the world economy. We can do this if we want to, and we can ensure a better and just distribution of the wealth of this world and of the fruits of work done all over the world.

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt (HIPC) Initiative is certainly a step in the right direction. I think that it is a very good starting point for development, with the proviso that it must not be used in such a way as to run counter to the need to increase official development assistance. Indeed, official development assistance is continuing to dwindle, and the HIPC Initiative must not be used as a pretext for cutting it still further.

It is important that all the peoples of the world be allowed to benefit from the wealth and resources of the world. It is our duty to ensure that, thanks to a spirit of solidarity and firm convictions, we can meet the challenges we face and step confidently into the future, in accordance with the commitments undertaken at Copenhagen.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Juan Carlos Aparicio, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of Spain.

Mr. Aparicio (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am pleased to speak on behalf of Spain at this special session of the General Assembly on social development and to share with all present what we have done to translate into reality the ideals enshrined five years ago at Copenhagen.

In 1995 we laid the foundation for social development. In the intervening years we have made progress, but significant areas of poverty and social exclusion remain to be dealt with. The European Union is aware of this reality, and at the Lisbon summit important progress was made in the combat against poverty and exclusion.

Globalization must go hand in hand with solidarity, and Spain would like to share with the Assembly its modest contribution to the progress achieved in the past years.

In the area of social integration, two significant demographic phenomena are posing major challenges to Spanish society. On the one hand, the gradual ageing of the national population has exacerbated problems related to the dependent status of elderly persons. Awareness of this dependence is becoming a key concept in policies aimed at the elderly and the disabled.

The Government of Spain would like to become a catalyst in the promotion of a wide-ranging national and international debate on ageing and its socio-economic consequences within the framework of preparations for the second world conference on ageing, to be held at Madrid in the year 2002.

Furthermore, the rapid increase in the immigrant population in recent years has made it necessary to create a special framework for protecting these people and ensuring that their rights are respected. The promotion of the value of intercultural coexistence in Spanish society requires priority attention.

In the area of gender equality, a great deal of progress has been made in the past few years. We welcome these achievements, which help chart the course to be taken in keeping with the commitments and objectives set out at the special session to review the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in New York from 5 to 9 June last, and in accordance with the policies of the European Union in this respect.

Spain has reaffirmed its commitment with regard to equality at the national level, at the level of the autonomous regions and at the local level, in keeping with the territorial organization of the Spanish State.

In the area of employment, legal measures have been taken to combat women's unemployment, their vertical and horizontal segregation, the short-term

nature of their contracts and the difficulties they face in juggling family and work, as well as to create more and better jobs.

Although clear progress has been achieved, certain aspects still need to be addressed, inter alia, access by women to high-level and decision-making posts. Even though the participation of women has gradually increased, there remains a clear qualitative and quantitative imbalance in the participation of women in all sectors of social life.

In the political arena, women are holding increasingly responsible posts. For example, in the National Parliament, women's participation rate is 26 per cent in the Senate and 28 per cent in the Congress of Deputies. The rate is 34 per cent in the European Parliament — higher than the European Parliament average of about 30 per cent. Thus in terms of political participation by women Spain ranks eighth among the 15 countries of the European Union and the 12 countries of the Council of Europe.

Violence against women is receiving particular attention from the Government, and we have redoubled our efforts to eradicate it. We have approved a plan aimed at dealing with this phenomenon. It sets out a number of objectives and measures to eradicate domestic violence and to make available the necessary social resources to assist women who have been the victims of these acts of violence, with an investment of about $70 million.

Education continues to be a fundamentally important tool for the advancement of women. In this respect, we have made a special effort to train women in fields such as technology and science.

All of these actions show clearly that Spain is implementing the new initiatives proposed in the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", and that it is following the guidelines of the European Union.

I should like also to refer briefly to the importance of health and development. This special session provides us an excellent opportunity to reiterate the commitments of the Copenhagen Summit and to move towards a multidimensional view of human development by strengthening its social components, especially those relating to health. In this respect, let me stress the importance of ensuring the provision of health services to women and girls, including for sexual and reproductive health.

In Spain health coverage is universal and public. We have, within the framework of the National Health Service, a protocol for sexual health and family planning, approved by all territorial administrations. In addition, the national plan for the prevention of domestic violence, which I referred to earlier, includes a special health protocol.

Lastly, I wish to refer to the activities of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation in the field of social development, which have increased significantly since 1995.

Ninety-two projects are under way in the framework of Spanish bilateral cooperation. These benefit the most vulnerable sectors of the population and represent a mobilization of financial resources of around 1.8 million Spanish pesetas.

In addition, subsidies are allocated to projects presented and carried out by the Spanish non-governmental organizations. By their very nature, these projects support social development, as they relate to health, education, work, labour, elimination of social marginalization and so on, but it is practically impossible to quantify the specific contribution made to each of those sectors. However, it is noteworthy that in 1999, total subsidies to non-governmental organizations for the implementation of projects in the field of social development exceeded 13.4 million Spanish pesetas.

At the multilateral level, Spain continues to cooperate in the implementation of a number of projects, including the one aimed at eradicating child labour in Latin America, which is being carried out by the International Labour Organization.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Spain's commitment to these ideals. The time has come to translate them into reality, so let us all work towards that goal.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mr. Miha Brejc, Minister for Labour, Family and Social Affairs of Slovenia.

Mr. Brejc (Slovenia): Allow me to express my gratitude for the preparatory work that was done for this special session of the General Assembly, which is

of pivotal importance for exchanging views on experiences, on examples of good practices and, not least, on the obstacles encountered in our respective countries in addressing the issues of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.

Slovenia fully aligns itself with the statement made by the Minister of Labour and Solidarity of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

The Government of Slovenia wishes to extend its firm support for the objectives encompassed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, and to underline the importance of assessing, as a follow-up to the guidelines outlined in Copenhagen in 1995, the accomplishments made and, of course, of finding the most appropriate ways to further implement the initiatives. However, as the aforementioned issues represent composite and interwoven topics, it has to be emphasized that we can tackle them only by recognizing their complexity and must act accordingly, at both national and international levels.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the transition towards a market economy in Slovenia and the subsequent loss of certain markets brought about temporary negative trends of economic growth and, as a result, a marked increase in unemployment. Since 1993 we have been witnessing a revival of economic growth and a substantial improvement in the living standards of most of the Slovene population. In 1999 the economic growth of Slovenia was one of the greatest in Europe. However, we are aware that general economic and social development does per se not imply an improved situation for everyone. The prevention of poverty and of related social exclusion is therefore a fundamental objective of social policy in Slovenia.

In the areas which contribute to a great extent to the alleviation of social exclusion — namely, the policies of education, employment, health, housing, social assistance and services — numerous programmes have already been or are currently being developed. Irrespective of that, the Government of Slovenia is of the opinion that an integral national strategy is required; hence, it adopted a special programme on the fight against poverty and social exclusion at the beginning of this year.

The main goal of this programme and a general objective of our Government is to overcome a multidimensional problem, which poverty and social exclusion undoubtedly are, by employing appropriate interconnection, harmonization and expansion of the existing measures and programmes. The programme, along with numerous others adopted in recent years, addresses the issues of employability with a specific emphasis on vulnerable groups, and it underlines the importance of education for all categories of the population.

We wish to emphasize that there is an urgent need for measures to rectify the current situation concerning social exclusion both in a national and in a global context. Therefore, it is believed to be important to reduce poverty and social exclusion by means of permanent activities and actions, thus preventing the long-term exclusion of individuals and their families. Such action, in order to be successful, requires the concerted efforts of the international governmental organizations, Governments, local communities, public services and non-governmental organizations.

The modern world is increasingly characterized by the extensive welfare of some people, on one hand, which is, regrettably, accompanied by the silent poverty of growing numbers of people, on the other. The Government of Slovenia believes this obvious dichotomy is becoming unacceptable and urgently requires correction. In spite of improvements in several specific areas of social and economic development, the spread of pluralism and democratic institutions and the observance of fundamental human rights, the world is, more than ever, faced with a growing number of people, predominantly women and youth, who are afflicted by hunger and other deprivations.

The increasing internal social problems in individual countries threaten the well-being of their inhabitants, exerting a negative impact on the quality of life in general. In numerous rich and developing countries the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, as is the gap between the most and the least developed countries.

The Government of Slovenia applauds the fact that the world community is becoming conscious that, along with global changes in the world economy, the fundamental parameters of social development in all countries should also be changed. Social and economic policies need to be in conformity, as the interests of the population have to be mirrored in the interests of the State. It has been ascertained that poverty and

unemployment often result in isolation, marginalization and violence. Even more, poverty has been found to offer fertile ground for massive infringements of human rights in the world.

Therefore, I wish to express the readiness of the Government of Slovenia to cooperate at the international level in a concerted effort to erase absolute poverty in the world, and I underline that our goal is to create a society for everybody in which every individual plays an active part.

The President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Nicolae Tabacaru, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Tabacaru (Republic of Moldova): I am pleased to address this special session, and I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations and the Swiss authorities for offering excellent conditions for our work.

Since the Copenhagen Summit, globalization has presented new challenges for the fulfilment of the commitments made in 1995, such as the eradication of poverty, the promotion of full employment, social integrity and guaranteeing social services for all. However, achieving the goals of the Programme of Action adopted in the framework of the World Summit for Social Development represents a problem for many nations.

Besides being a great opportunity for the economic and social development of all countries, the globalization process also brings a real danger of increasing inequality between them. It is a well-known fact that the small economies in transition are extremely vulnerable to the current social and economic challenges. The delay of positive processes in the economies of these countries has caused the worsening of the social situation of their populations.

The eradication of poverty heads the list of the major problems that many countries, including Moldova, are facing at the moment.

The Republic of Moldova makes considerable efforts to resolve these problems, but the country was seriously affected by the traumas of transition, which caused huge disturbances of an economic, political and social character. The transition from a planning economy to the market economy needs not only a radical change in the mentality of the population, which is used to different types of social guarantees provided by the Government, but also large budget expenditures. During recent years, dozens of categories of beneficiaries of State social guarantees have lost this kind of assistance. In the case of Moldova, the situation is even worse, given the fact that we inherited a population that had a large number of retired people.

The rate of unemployment, which increased considerably during the past decade, became an unavoidable obstacle to democratic reforms. Unfortunately, many Moldovans have learned their first lessons about transition to the market economy by losing their jobs. Believe me, it is not the best way to learn.

Of course, we do our best to cope with the situation, but we consider that the international community should largely support national efforts. The countries with economies in transition, among which is the Republic of Moldova, need financial assistance from international organizations and funds to realize the goals of social development and transition to a market-based economy. These countries' cooperation with such international organizations as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral bodies working on social development issues, is essential if they are to strengthen social integration and social protection. The Government is undertaking measures to rebuild the social sector, which serves as the foundation for the national strategy of poverty alleviation.

Despite the fact that countries like Moldova are engaged in rather intensive multilateral cooperation with international organizations, the results in the sphere of social development and in living standards remain insufficient, so humanitarian assistance from the international community should become an important additional tool. In this regard, my country actively supports the intensification of coordination in this field and welcomes initiatives like the Fribourg process. As Moldova is now facing an unprecedented drought, which, according to the estimates, will greatly affect the national economy and the social sector, it goes without saying that such initiatives are extremely helpful in dealing with natural disasters and their social impact.

We believe that social assistance has to be promoted as a State social policy and administered by a central specialized structure in close cooperation with non-governmental charity organizations and

associations, foundations and individuals. The reform of the social assistance system includes such objectives as the analysis and evaluation of the social and economic phenomena that are causing the demand for social assistance; setting up the legal conditions for the granting and administering of help; identifying and stimulating social and professional activities in order to meet the requirements of people and families who are exposed to risk, the potential social-assistance clients; and training and improving the professional capacities of the staff involved in granting social assistance. The programmes elaborated by the Government have been developed in close cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations.

Returning to our current work, I should mention that our State highly appreciates the political declaration prepared by the Preparatory Committee of this special session, which invites Governments, the United Nations and other relevant international organizations to strengthen within their respective mandates the quality and consistency of their support for sustainable development in countries with economies in transition.

The ultimate goal of social development is to improve and enhance the quality of life of all people. This requires an opportunity for each member of a society to exercise his or her right and responsibility to take an active part in the affairs of the community. Only together can we achieve sustainable growth on a global scale — growth that would promote equity, social justice, tolerance and responsibility.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. A. Abdullah, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan.

Mr. Abdullah (Afghanistan): Scores of nations and thousands of millions of people throughout the world would like to hope that the title of this special session of the General Assembly will one day become a reality in their everyday lives. Today, however, we must admit that for them, globalization means marginalization and the worsening of their social conditions. The gap between rich and poor is developing into a gulf at the international as well as the national level.

I shall not quote figures that are known to all, but more and more people are becoming trapped by poverty, sickness and illiteracy. For them, the concept of a "global village" is a pipe dream. The development of globalization is irreversible; but as it develops, it brings with it a greater degree of marginalization. Humankind cannot and must not bow to the law of the market alone; politics cannot abandon the field. A number of the conflicts raging in the world today are sustained, if not actually stimulated, by economic and financial interests offering immediate gain, whereas a prerequisite for lasting development is stability.

We need rules. If the trend towards marginalization is not checked, the world will be faced with unforeseeable upheavals. If that trend continues, it will foster the emergence of fanatical and extremist forces that will not provide a solution to the problems of poverty, but instead be a threat to international stability and security.

Social development cannot be achieved in isolation. It has to be envisaged in a global framework of economic, cultural and political development. The two essential pillars that sustain the whole structure are health and education for all. Women have a preponderant role to play. The primary precondition for the achievement of the social development aims that the international community set itself in Copenhagen five years ago is the existence of a favourable environment.

We consider that the necessary action to that end must be organized at three levels at the national level, the essential framework is one of respect for the renewed will of the people, respect for human rights, the participation of civil society and good governance: in short, a democratic framework and a voluntarist policy favouring women, girls and the most vulnerable groups. At the regional level, the regional environment implies respect for the sovereignty of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. These are the essential preconditions for regional cooperation and economic complementarities to be taken into account. At the international level, the rich countries need to honour their commitments to the developing countries, in particular to the least developed countries. This effort should include matters relating to debt, and the policies and programmes of international financial institutions should take into account considerations of social development.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan actively participated in the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995, and started the implementation of its national

programme of action by using all possible means. Unfortunately, at the same time, March 1995, the Taliban mercenaries attacked Kabul, the capital, and continued their military campaign until they succeeded in invading the capital in September 1996.

A good number of the 10 commitments made by the Summit members became objects of the attention of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in 1995. The unfortunate course of events — the September 1996 invasion of Kabul by the Taliban, and subsequent tragedies — introduced major obstacles that prevented the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments. One of the tragic consequences of the Taliban military occupation was the complete shutting down of all girls schools and high schools in the occupied areas of the country. Girls were absolutely prevented from attending universities and technical schools.

Girls and women were forbidden to leave their houses, even though in Kabul and most occupied cities, women widowed in earlier wars had been working and were breadwinners, supporting their children. Restrictive measures also were taken to bar access by women and girls to health-related services.

In general, the educational level of the male population has also declined in the past five years. The Taliban mercenaries have not provided any budgetary allocation for the most elementary research institutions or technical centres. This state of social and cultural decrepitude is the result of military occupation. The Taliban is not interested in taking any measures for the eradication of poverty; its main objective is to subjugate Afghans by military means and conquer all the country.

In the areas controlled by the Government, the educational system functions normally for boys and girls. Girls' schools are open, and the female staff members of the Ministry of Education are continuing to do their jobs. Hospitals and health centres are open to both women and men.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan, despite its scarce resources, continues to assist the people in tackling their problems. It is noteworthy that the foreign-imposed conflict in Afghanistan has had negative effects on the areas controlled by the Government as well.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan is expecting the full implementation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan, including those parts of the resolutions which refer to emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy, reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-stricken Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I am launching an appeal to the international community and to concerned international relief agencies, including non-governmental organizations, to start or enhance their assistance for the purpose of the social development of the entire population of Afghanistan.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Byron Ismar Morales López, Under-Secretary for Planning and Public Investment, Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency of Guatemala.

Mr. Morales López (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to participate in this summit, at which we will be able to share the various experiences of our countries in the social field. I will briefly describe the social context of my country, including the advances made in fulfilling the Copenhagen commitments and the main problems that remain. In this context, I will outline the principal features of the new Government's social policy, which were recently presented by President Alfonso Portillo Cabrera.

The population of my country is mostly young and predominantly rural. Slightly more than half of the Guatemalan population consists of 22 linguistic communities that share socio-cultural traits inherited from their Mayan ancestors. These indigenous groups were the principal victims of the armed conflict that for 36 years ravaged the country, killing and injuring thousands and leaving in its wake large numbers of widows, orphans and displaced persons, as well as incalculable material losses.

Fortunately, that conflict was brought to an end by the conclusion of the 1996 Peace Accords. The commitments embodied in those Accords coincide to a large extent with what was agreed at Copenhagen five years ago, as regards both the intentions of the drafters and the actions provided for. Their main objectives include the strengthening of the democratic State, with full enjoyment of individual rights, respect for the identity of indigenous peoples, the overcoming of marginalization and exclusion, and a dynamic and sustained development.

The assessment by the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala of the progress made so far in the process of implementation of the Agreements shows substantial advances in some areas and setbacks and stagnation in others. There have no doubt been significant strides in various sectors of social policy, but it has not yet been possible to extend the benefits to the entire population. Similarly, important achievements have been registered in the area of human rights and the improvement of the justice system, even though some problems remain. It is in the economic area that the greatest limitations exist, particularly with respect to increasing the tax burden and increasing the country's productivity.

On 14 January 2000 the Government of President Alfonso Portillo Cabrera took office following democratic elections in which a record number of voters participated. The basic proposals made by the new chief executive include the implementation of the Peace Accords. His priorities also include the fulfilment of international commitments, the defence and promotion of the democratic rule of law, the reduction of poverty, the promotion of sustainable development, an increase in the scope and quality of services to the population, gender equality, the realization of the right of women to reproductive health, decentralization of the State, greater participation by the citizenry, and respect for the identity and rights of indigenous peoples.

In order to accomplish these objectives, a proposal was presented for the conclusion of a covenant on democratic governance based on the Peace Accords and on the consensus and participation of all sectors of the population, with the aim of reducing poverty and achieving joint participation in national development poverty.

Mention should also be made of another key development, namely the recent conclusion of a fiscal agreement between the Government, private enterprise and civil society. Through this historic undertaking, Guatemalan society will promote, by every possible means, the highest possible degree of financial cooperation, through the tax system and by improving tax collection, in order to obtain the resources required to finance a social development process benefiting the widest segments of society.

As I have pointed out, advances have been made as regards the fulfilment of the commitments entered into by Guatemala at the World Summit for Social Development. I should like to give the following examples.

After decades of institutionalized violations of fundamental human rights, the country is heading towards a consolidation of the democratic rule of law and respect for human rights. In addition, major projects to promote the development of indigenous peoples have been financed. In 1999, the Land Fund Law was enacted, whose goal is to facilitate access by rural inhabitants to that resource.

As regards the situation of women, since the signing of the Peace Accords concrete commitments have been undertaken, with particular emphasis on indigenous women. As part of these commitments, a National Women's Forum was established, and, more recently, the Secretariat for Women, a body created to supervise public policy on the advancement of Guatemalan women.

In the area of social expenditures, the percentage of the gross domestic product set aside for expenses in education and health was more than 50 per cent higher in 1999 than in 1995. Illiteracy was reduced by 5 per cent between 1990 and 1999. Despite this positive trend, high levels persist, mainly in the rural areas and among the indigenous population and women. Thus, one of the Government's main commitments is to reduce illiteracy by at least 50 per cent before 2004.

The net rate of student enrolment in primary education increased by 12.5 per cent between 1995 and 1999. This increased coverage was possible because of greater community participation throughout the territory.

In the area of health, the population's access to basic health care rose by about 20 per cent between 1995 and 1999. Infant mortality dropped from 51 to 45 per 1,000 live births. The new health policy seeks to optimize the budget, extend coverage and improve the quality of services and decentralize them, placing greater emphasis on preventive health care.

In conclusion, it is clear that despite the prevailing problems, Guatemala has achieved progress in the social arena and in fulfilling the Peace Agreements. We reiterate our determination to pursue all efforts necessary to consolidate the comprehensive human development of Guatemalans and to promote sustainable social development in the world, as agreed

in Copenhagen and to be agreed at this meeting. We hope that this gathering will provide a good opportunity for strengthening our ties of cooperation so that we will be joined in common efforts to raise the level of well-being of our peoples and of the relations between States within a framework of justice and equity.

The Acting President: I call on Her Excellency Mrs. Bárbara Canedo Patiño, Minister Counsellor and General Director of Multilateral Affairs of Bolivia.

Mrs. Patiño (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): One of the basic aspects of the World Summit for Social Development, held in 1995, was the acknowledgement by States that social improvement should be an integral part of development strategies at the national and international levels and that the individual should be the subject and the object of this development.

Governments and international organizations have responded in various ways to the 10 commitments and to the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, agreed at Copenhagen; five years after that meeting, the study and assessment of the results reveal that many new policies and national programmes have been initiated at the international level. We have come together here to reaffirm and renew our commitment to the objectives established at the Summit.

In this context, the Government of Bolivia has carried out a review of State policies implemented over the last few years. The main national objectives that have been consensually agreed in the national dialogue, "Bolivia towards the twenty-first century", are oriented around four main pillars: opportunity, dignity, justice and institutionality, and equity. These clearly form the conceptual theoretical basis of the Government's plan known as "Commitment for Bolivia", which is being driven ahead by the Government of the President of the Republic, Mr. Hugo Banzer Suárez.

Within the framework of these four pillars, the main challenge faced by my country is reducing poverty and social inequality, eliminating social, cultural, ethnic and gender exclusion to create real equality of opportunity, thus improving the distribution of income.

The Government of Bolivia is aware that the fight against poverty requires public policies that are aimed at achieving better ways of distributing goods and at offering to the groups excluded from the economic process effective measures to change their situation. For that reason, I wish to take this opportunity to describe some advances and obstacles that have been identified in my country in the area of social development.

In the area of justice and human rights, the reform of the State's political Constitution regulates major institutions, such as the Constitutional Court, the Council of the Judiciary and the Ombudsman.

The law on popular participation has given new content and vigour to Bolivia's communities, making them the main level of decision-making and of implementation of the country's decentralization process. The law establishes a regime of economic and financial resources at the district level that makes it possible to strengthen the efficiency of public administration.

Regarding the economic situation resulting from the structural reforms initiated in Bolivia in 1985, it must be pointed out that these reforms are based on liberalization of the economy, openness to other countries, disciplined fiscal policy and a monetary policy aimed at maintaining stable prices and exchange rates. Moreover, in order to stimulate private investment, internal guidelines and norms have been improved, creating laws that increase the flow of national and foreign investments.

Significant progress has been made in my country in the social arena. We have been able to develop a legal environment aimed at increasing citizen participation. Among the main laws are the law on educational reform within the framework of sustainable human development — which covers social, economic, political and cultural aspects — intended to promote people's growth as individuals and members of society.

Article 171 of the State's political Constitution and the law on popular participation recognize the right of indigenous peoples to exercise self-government and self-administration.

Work for equality and equity among the women and men of Bolivia is part of the national Government's public policies. A significant achievement has been the development of specific laws and instruments to make these policies operational. For example, we have the law on parties, the Electoral Code, the law on quotas, the law against domestic and

family violence, the decree on equal opportunity for men and women, draft laws against sexual harassment and on domestic workers and the institutionalization of policies on food safety, human settlements for rural development, support for strengthening the productive infrastructure of services and organizational reinforcement.

However, despite our efforts, we still face obstacles worsened by international financial crises that restrict our capacity to confront problems of poverty and marginalization.

The Government of Bolivia considers that the fight against poverty should be aimed not only at avoiding and overcoming social injustice and inequality, but also at substantially improving the quality of the human resources required to stimulate economic development.

Finally, the challenge of eradicating poverty must be an obligation of both rich and poor countries; it is up to all of us.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Kakima Ntambi, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda.

Mr. Ntambi (Uganda): My delegation and I cherish the opportunity to add Uganda's voice to those of the previous speakers in congratulating the President on his election to the Presidency of the current General Assembly special session. I also express appreciation to the host Government of Switzerland for the welcome and the warm hospitality that has been accorded to all of us since our arrival here in Geneva. The Uganda delegation also expresses appreciation to the leadership of the United Nations system for the invaluable contributions and the role it continues to play in furtherance of the positive social developments and changes within and among nations.

The Copenhagen Summit recognized that social, economic and technological advancement was important for our countries. However, this position, though welcome and noteworthy, was not new. What was distinctively new and significant was that the Summit participants went further, to agree that any development must be for the benefit of the human person. The Summit participants overwhelmingly agreed that people must be placed at the very centre of the development for which they ought to be and are, indeed, ultimately the sole purpose.

That global understanding — a remarkably unique and historic consensus — led to the adoption of wide-ranging commitments, the implementation of which would fundamentally transform our societies. This transformation would lead to renewed and dynamic societies within which there would be more respect for people and less social and economic inequalities.

As the Assembly is aware, Uganda actively participated in the Copenhagen Summit, and subsequently subscribed fully to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for social development. We consequently undertook to implement the commitments contained in the Declaration. We committed ourselves to put in place measures that would reduce mass poverty by reducing radically the percentage of the population living in absolute poverty. We promised to increase basic social services in the areas of primary education, primary health care and the provision of safe and clean water to our people.

This session was convened to review the progress of implementation of that Declaration. Uganda is therefore pleased to be participating in this meeting in order to give an account and to share experiences with other nations on the matter, and also to contribute to the debate on the way forward.

Uganda has taken the issues of economic advancement and social development very seriously for the last decade under its current Movement Administration. The Copenhagen Declaration went a long way in reinforcing and providing further momentum and encouragement for what Uganda was already doing.

On the economic management front, Uganda has implemented a very comprehensive programme of economic reforms designed to achieve, inter alia, three things: first, to correct macroeconomic imbalances; secondly, to institute financial-stabilization and structural-adjustment policies designed to correct distortions in resource allocations across all sectors; and thirdly, to improve microeconomic efficiency and transform the economy to achieve sustainable growth.

In addition to those policy actions, public institutions have been privatized, the financial markets liberalized and the civil service restructured with a

view to making it more efficient. As a consequence of those policy measures, for the last 10 years Uganda's gross domestic product has grown at an annual rate of 6 per cent, and inflation has been held to an average of 5 per cent per annum.

So much for the economic side of Uganda's endeavours. I know that the Assembly expects me to now revert to the question of social development, for which this session has been specifically convened.

In line with the Copenhagen Declaration, the Government of Uganda believes that the gap between the haves and have-nots must be narrowed. All citizens, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, must be empowered. Poverty must be reduced and if possible eradicated. Dignity must be restored to every Ugandan, especially to those belonging to the vulnerable groups. The Government has taken serious measures to ensure that the people's rights are respected — rights to food, rights to work, rights to education, rights to free expression, rights to primary health care and such like.

Conscious of the plight of the vulnerable and marginalized groups, which encompass women, youth, children, people with disabilities and the elderly, the Uganda Government has put in place policy measures and institutions to address their interests and concerns. One such institution is the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. Women, youth and people with disabilities are now represented in parliament and all administrative councils. All projects and programmes, as well as leadership positions, are gender-responsive as a result of the gender-mainstreaming policy of the Government. The Assembly may be aware, for example, that Uganda's Vice-President is a woman, and many more women have assumed decision-making positions in the country.

The Government of Uganda believes in the necessity of economic and social empowerment, through education, training, sensitization and the fight against poverty. Following a deliberate Parliament decision, compulsory universal primary education was established four years ago. This programme dramatically increased enrolment in primary schools from 2.9 million in 1996 to 6.6 million in 1999. Over the same period, girls' enrolment has gone up by 40 per cent while that of boys has increased by 9 per cent. The challenge is now to ensure quality education by coping with the increased numbers and to provide sufficient classrooms, teachers and teaching materials. There is also a need to ensure reduced drop-out rates, especially for the girl child.

Specific programmes have been established to address the problems of poverty. One such initiative is the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, which establishes the policy framework for the eradication of poverty and prioritizes public actions across sectors with the objective of poverty eradication through participatory approaches. A complementary but comprehensive plan for the modernization of agriculture has also been developed to contribute to the eradication of poverty. Other initiatives include programmes of microfinance to offer deserving groups concessional terms and skill-development programmes, which are organized to benefit specific groups. Non-governmental organizations and civil society have also played a complementary role in the fight against poverty.

There is in Uganda a commission on human rights to which abuses of people's rights are reported, and by which such complaints are handled. There is also the office of the Inspector General of Government. Elsewhere — in Europe, for example — this official might be called an ombudsman. The official investigates corruption and abuse of office by public officials and subsequently takes corrective actions.

In the health sector Uganda has prioritized health-care services in the following areas: HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, immunization of children, child nutrition, and reproductive and maternal health care. Emphasis is also placed on the population having access to safe and clean water. As a result of Government initiatives in the health sector, especially in the promotion of awareness and the immunization of children, the indicators show that infant mortality is now 88 per 1,000 live births, as compared to 188 per 1,000 in 1986.

The national prevalence rate for HIV/AIDS decreased from 18.5 per cent in 1995 to 9.5 per cent in 1998, which translates into a 50 per cent decline. However, access to treatment for those already living with AIDS is a national challenge and requires concerted efforts on the part of the international community.

In order to have sustainable economic growth while tackling the problems of poverty, social integration, unemployment and provision of basic

social services, we will require not only the pursuit of comprehensive and coherent economic policies but also continued goodwill and support from our development partners. Although a lot has been achieved in the area of social development in Uganda, there is room for improvement through additional requisite human and financial resources.

I should add that the aforementioned achievements took place with the assistance of Uganda's development partners, which include the donor community, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the United Nations system and the Ugandan people themselves. While expressing appreciation to our partners, I invite them to remain with us for yet greater development challenges in the years that lie ahead.

I would be remiss to talk about achieving social development for all without mentioning the challenges facing us in implementing the Copenhagen Declaration in a globalizing world. It is a fact that, with globalization, today there is more rampant poverty, and the gap between the rich and poor is widening both within and between nations. Our concern has been the lack of sufficient social safety nets to ensure that the social costs of this process are not unfairly borne by poor people and marginalized groups.

This special session has provided an excellent opportunity for us all to take stock of the lessons and experiences of the past and to look forward to improving upon these new ideas and future directions. On this historic occasion, Uganda would like to reiterate its commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit in 1995, and we are looking forward to the emergence of further initiatives currently being discussed at this session.

The Ugandan Government will continue to strengthen and coordinate its effort in partnership with the Bretton Woods institutions, relevant non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society, the donor community and the United Nations, so as to accelerate the social transformation of our society.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mya Than, Chairman of the delegation of Myanmar.

Mr. Than (Myanmar): Allow me to begin by extending our warmest congratulations to the President on his unanimous election to lead the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world." We are confident that he will be able to steer the proceedings of this Assembly to a successful conclusion.

The draft texts of the political declaration and further actions and initiatives now being considered by the Assembly can be summarized in the following three propositions: first, we should achieve sustainable economic development and poverty eradication by fulfilling the targets set by the World Social Summit. Secondly, we should step up social development, supported by sustainable economic development, by fulfilling the targets set by the World Social Summit. Thirdly, we should ensure that the centre of economic and social development is the people and their well-being, which entails food security, primary health care and basic education. In order to achieve these goals, action is required at both the national and international levels.

Allow me to apprise the Assembly briefly of a few selected instances of our national endeavours to achieve these lofty goals in Myanmar. Through the implementation of four national economic objectives, Myanmar is making steady and sustained progress in terms of economic development and poverty alleviation. Our short-term Four-Year Plan from 1992/1993 to 1995/1996 was a success, registering an average annual gross domestic product growth rate of 7.5 per cent against the targeted rate of 5.1 per cent. Despite the spillover effect of the Asian financial crisis, Myanmar was able to maintain the annual gross domestic product growth rate at 4.6 per cent in 1997-1998. By 1998-1999, Myanmar's economy had bounced back, registering a gross domestic product growth rate of 5.7 per cent. The nation's annual gross domestic product growth rate has now reached a high point by registering 10.9 per cent in the current financial year, 1999-2000.

The Government's economic development strategy is people-centred and is aimed at the alleviation and eventual eradication of poverty in rural areas, particularly in the less developed border areas. Consequently, national races in the border areas of Myanmar are enjoying a higher level of socio-

economic development, higher living standards and happier lives than they have ever experienced before.

As regards the drug problem, Myanmar is indeed a country at the forefront of the war against illicit drugs. The determination, commitment and sacrifice of Myanmar in combating the menace of illicit drugs are now being increasingly recognized by the international community. To cite just one example, Myanmar has sacrificed the lives of 716 members of the armed forces in military operations to interdict drug traffickers.

One significant accomplishment in this respect has been the establishment of a drug-free zone in Mongla region in the Eastern Shan State. More drug-free zones have been declared and are being implemented. More importantly, the Myanmar Government has launched a Master Plan for 1999-2014 to totally eradicate poppy cultivation and the drug menace in the country within 15 years.

We fully subscribe to the concept of people-centred development, as contained in the Copenhagen Declaration. We strongly believe that socio-economic development should be geared to the basic needs of the people. This coincides with the traditional Myanmar saying that it is essential to provide the basic needs of the people — food, clothing and shelter.

In accordance with this dictum, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has been doing its utmost to provide food, clothing and shelter, primary health care and basic education to all its citizens. The requirement to satisfy these basic human needs indeed constitutes the foundation of the right to development.

By fulfilling these basic needs of the people, the Government is promoting and advancing the right of the people of Myanmar to development, inclusive of economic and social development.

At the same time, the Government is intensifying its efforts to further improve the economic and social conditions of the people to the best of its ability. Myanmar society has also reached a high level of social integration. In this context, it is worth noting that the unique way of life of the Myanmar family is at the heart of the process of effective social integration in Myanmar. In this respect, the infrastructure-building and border-area development undertaken by the Government is also facilitating social integration among the national races in the country.

Let me now touch briefly upon some aspects of achieving social development in a globalizing world.

The greatest challenge facing humankind today is economic development and poverty eradication. In a globalizing world, poverty anywhere can jeopardize prosperity everywhere. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Poverty Report*, the number people living under the poverty line throughout the world was estimated at 1.2 billion in 1998. It is therefore imperative that urgent and effective measures be taken to eradicate poverty in the developing countries and to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Globalization presents us with both enormous challenges and great opportunities. While preventive measures must be taken to neutralize its negative effects, we must accentuate the positive and take advantage of the vast possibilities it offers to facilitate our economic and social development.

Our programme of action at the international level should effectively address crucial issues such as debt relief, improved market access for developing countries, and international assistance for economic development and poverty eradication in those countries.

Undoubtedly, capacity-building for developing countries is of crucial importance. This is also an area in which international assistance is very much needed.

We cannot achieve the objectives set out in our programme of action in a world that is half poor and half rich, half developing and half developed. We must not rest on our present laurels. We must not slacken the pace but sustain and step up the momentum of our efforts to realize our shared vision of a better world, where economic prosperity, social justice and social harmony will prevail.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker on the list for this morning.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Tesfaye (Ethiopia): Mr. President, since my delegation is taking the floor for the first time in the formal deliberations of this special session of the General Assembly, let me put on record our profound appreciation for the outstanding leadership and guidance you have demonstrated in the work of the Assembly.

I would not have intervened at this point in time had it not been for the unsubstantiated allegations directed against my country by the Eritrean delegation. Hence my delegation is obliged to refute the usual deceitful propaganda and prevarication levelled against Ethiopia by the delegation of Eritrea. We would like to set the record straight, as follows.

The international community knows full well that Ethiopia is the victim of the unprovoked aggression of Eritrea. In fact, the naked aggression of Eritrea against Ethiopia in May 1998 was a continuation of the aggressive policy of the Government of Eritrea against its neighbours. It is to be noted that Eritrea, in its brief existence as an independent State, has waged wars of aggression against its four neighbours; the last victim of these aggressive and expansionist policies is Ethiopia. In order to advance its policies of destabilization, the Eritrean Government has conscripted 10 per cent of its population for military purposes. Eritrea, with a population of less than 3.5 million, has an army which in 1998 was three times larger than Ethiopia's. Ethiopia has been dragged into this unwanted war in the exercise of its inherent right of self-defence. In fact, Ethiopia has never, ever, in its long history, provoked or committed any act of aggression against a sovereign State or country.

We believe that Eritrea must be held accountable not only for its aggression against Ethiopia but also for diverting our attention and scarce resources from the fight against poverty and backwardness, which are the primary enemies of our peoples. Eritrea has no moral or legal right to accuse the Ethiopian Defence Forces of looting and destruction of private and public property. In fact, it was the Eritrean Government that confiscated private and public property worth more than $200 million from the ports of Assab and Massawa in the wake of its war of aggression of May 1998. This is a subject that is well documented and which is being carefully handled by the appropriate regional and international bodies for compensation as soon as possible.

Eritrea should also be held responsible for killing close to 200 innocent civilians and for abducting about 650 others in the first few days of the war alone. As people fled for their lives, over 350,000 were displaced from their homes and communities, and many individuals were separated from their families, including thousands of children, who still do not know the whereabouts of their parents. Furthermore, at least 34 schools, 14 health centres, 15 wells and 8,000 houses were destroyed by the Eritrean troops in the occupied Ethiopian territories.

At this particular point in time, close to 50,000 Ethiopian civilians have been rounded up, detained and tortured in concentration camps in Eritrea by the Eritrean army and security agents. These are innocent Ethiopians residing in Eritrea. We urge the international community to take immediate measures to rescue these innocent civilians from the immeasurable sufferings they are facing before we witness gruesome humanitarian tragedies in the Horn of Africa.

To hide these horrendous crimes, the Eritrean regime continues with its baseless propaganda with regard to Eritrean nationals asked to leave Ethiopia for compelling national security reasons. Ethiopia has always been fully transparent with regard to Eritrean nationals in Ethiopia.

My Government was forced to ask some Eritrean nationalists to go back to their country because they were found engaged in activities against the national security of Ethiopia to help the war efforts of their country. This limited action was done in full accordance with the national laws of the country and international obligations. However, the Eritrean regime tries to exploit this matter for its war propaganda and hate campaign against Ethiopia. Ethiopia, in its resolute determination not to reward aggression and to protect its sovereignty, has exercised its legal rights to defend itself and has successfully reversed the Eritrean aggression.

Finally, we would like to bring to the attention of this body the fact that by accusing Ethiopia at this social forum, the Eritrean delegation has tried to undermine the agreement reached in Algiers on 10 June 2000. The agreement, brokered by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), under the chairmanship of the Algerian President — the current Chairman of the OAU — and with the participation of the United States and the European Union, clearly states that both parties

should restrain themselves from any form of hostilities which hinders the process of achieving lasting peace in the region.

With the disregard manifested by the Eritrean delegation, it is clear that Eritrea has no interest in a lasting peace, which is the prerequisite for social development.

Mr. Kazhoyan (Armenia): It was not the intention of my delegation to take the floor at this hour. However, the statement of one of the delegations earlier today compelled me to speak on issues not directly related to social development.

Listening to the final part of the statement of the Azerbaijani Minister this afternoon, I remembered a saying which goes, "Regardless of how many times one pronounces sugar, it will never make one's mouth sweeter". What I want to say is that, regardless of the fact that within the last 24 hours the Azerbaijani delegation has at least three times referred to some sort of aggression, 20 per cent occupation and 1 million refugees, the just will of the Nagorny-Karabakh people for its right to self-determination will never qualify as aggression or occupation. Period.

I was also surprised to hear, on the one hand, references to such a brilliant personality as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and, on the other hand, lies, exaggerated data and unacceptable terminology in reference to another Member State.

While Armenia is doing its best to accommodate the refugees and the internally displaced persons and to integrate them into society without politicizing their problems in any way whatsoever, Azerbaijan has kept the internally displaced persons hostage to its political gains.

Are there any problems that Azerbaijan would like to settle here? Well, there are at least two official frameworks for addressing those concerns — bilateral and multilateral — within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. Armenia is ready to address these issues there, and we actually do discuss them. We can also acknowledge the ongoing cooperation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani non-governmental, human rights and grass-roots organizations.

So what is the use of sticking phrases like "20 per cent of occupied territories and 1 million refugees" into each and every statement of Azerbaijan on every possible subject, from issues of social development to problems of, for example, preservation and breeding of the sturgeon in the Caspian Sea? Instead of taking the image of a poor victim and putting the blame for each and every thing happening on this planet and in outer space on so-called Armenian aggression, that country, in the course of these years, should have accommodated at least some of its internally displaced persons in the more than 100,000 houses and apartments of the deported Armenians who used to live in Azerbaijan.

We think that a better way to move forward and to advance one's social development agenda is through regional cooperation and mutual understanding, not by seeking further escalation through making controversial statements at this forum.

Mr. Seyoum (Eritrea): It is not my intention to respond to the bountiful lies of the Ethiopian representative, which could not be verified by independent bodies; rather, I will dwell on the human dimension that is relevant to the topic of this special session.

When the head of my delegation made his statement this morning, it was in relation to the social development that this session is discussing. It was not in the political sense. So I do not want to make any political statements, but rather to bring up a very independent report by the BBC to just cite one of those cruel acts committed by the Ethiopian occupation in the last few days. This is, as I mentioned, a report of the BBC, on Wednesday, 21 June 2000. In this report, the reporter says:

> "The western Eritrean town of Tesseney has changed hands four times in the last month. The town is now under Eritrean control following an Ethiopian withdrawal on Monday.
>
> "However, the second period of Ethiopian occupation has left an indelible mark on the once thriving city whose population of 60,000 fled.
>
> "The hospital has been completely stripped. Medicine, equipment, even beds, have been taken. The church's kindergarten has been looted.
>
> "The school has been burnt along with the two banks, the petrol station, a grain store and the local administration building.

"Even the prayer mats have been taken from the mosque.

"The destruction was widespread. Yet locals said there had been no fighting in the town.

"An estimated 90 per cent of Tesseney has been looted, around 50 per cent was burnt or destroyed.

"Every conceivable kind of business has been broken into and the contents taken. What was left was set on fire.

"Private homes stand with the doors ajar; inside the remaining contents are strewn around. Dead livestock lie rotting in the sun.

"Around 50 Eritrean civilians remained during the occupation ...

"They said that within a day of the Ethiopians taking Tesseney, empty trucks with some Ethiopian civilians were brought into the town to help with the looting.

"Tables and chairs have been left piled outside many buildings — the Ethiopians were unable to fit them into the trucks.

"The legacy of what happened in Tesseney is difficult for many to accept ...

"Stretching south from Tesseney, the trail of destruction continues. The village of Aligidir, formerly home to 3,000 people, was one such victim.

"Warped metal sheets creak in the morning breeze, strewn around on the blackened earth among half-burnt wooden posts and the charred remains of pots and pans.

"Situated 10 km south of Tesseney, Aligidir was once a thriving centre for agricultural products and cotton growing.

"The handful of people who stayed in the village during the Ethiopian occupation told a story which is becoming familiar in this part of western Eritrea.

"They said that on Sunday, Ethiopian troops started looting the houses, then they set them on fire ...

"Not much of the village is left standing ...

"Instead, the new $40m cotton factory, the centre of the village's employment, was destroyed, as were the Government buildings.

"It is difficult to assess the long-term costs of what happened here."

This is just a single story that I wanted to share with this body. There are many towns that have met the same fate, but I am not going to repeat myself because I would be wasting this Assembly's time.

The Acting President: The Ethiopian delegation has asked for the floor. I would just like to remind delegations that the second intervention should not exceed five minutes.

Mr. Tesfaye (Ethiopia): When we first took the floor in exercise of our right of reply we clearly stated that we were compelled to do so because of Eritrea's provocation. Following its usual pattern of behaviour, the Eritrean delegation has once again undermined this special session of the General Assembly by injecting issues that are not under consideration and that are out of context.

Nonetheless, it is wish of my delegation to reveal the truth and expose this malicious propaganda campaign. First of all, Ethiopia, unlike Eritrea, does not have any territorial ambitions regarding its neighbours, nor does it allow its territory to be occupied by unprovoked Eritrean aggression.

Secondly, unlike the Eritrean regime, Ethiopia respects the rule of law and the principles that govern inter-State relations, and it is committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Thirdly, the Eritrean Government's hostility towards Ethiopian nationals residing in Eritrea is so abysmal that presently thousands of Ethiopians are exposed to maltreatment, imprisonment and summary executions — not to mention the prisoners of war whose whereabouts have yet to be identified by either the International Committee of the Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations.

Fourthly, Eritrea's commitment to international and regional agreements sharply contrasts with its deeds, as we have witnessed today, when the Eritrean delegation unfaithfully contradicted the cessation-of-hostilities agreement brokered by the Organization of African Unity, the United States of America and the European Union.

Regarding the issues that have been described in Tesseney, to our knowledge all that has been claimed to have happened in Tesseney is the concoction of a group of journalists who are affiliated with one side, and their allegations are neither documented nor substantiated by a neutral body.

My conclusion is that he who sows stones may not harvest grapes. My delegation thinks that the international community should prevail upon the Eritrean regime so that it does not sow the seeds of destabilization.

Mr. Seyoum (Eritrea): May I apologize for taking the floor for a second time. I just want to say that it is not my delegation's business to defend the credibility of the BBC, but what I read to this body was a report of the BBC of 21 June 2000. This was not a report of my Government or of any journalist from Eritrea; it was from the BBC. I stand by the statement that was made by the head of my delegation this morning.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.